United Nations

Press Release

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council unanimously renews mandate of United Nations peace-keeping force in the area -- UNIFIL -- for another six months, until 31 July.

- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees plans food distribution to West Bank and Gaza to alleviate hardships caused by Israeli-imposed curfews.

- Special Committee against Apartheid re-elects Ibrahim A. Gambari (Nigeria) Chairman for 1991 at first meeting of the year.

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The Security Council last night decided unanimously to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another six months, until the end of July.

By its decision, the Council called on all parties concerned to co-operate fully with the Force in confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and assisting the Lebanese Government in re-establishing its effective authority over that area.

In addition, the President of the Council made a statement on behalf of Council members, expressing full support for the Taif Agreement and for "the recent efforts of the Lebanese Government to extend its authority over all Lebanese territory". He commended the troops and troop-contributing countries of UNIFIL for their sacrifices and commitment, under difficult circumstances, to the cause of international peace and security.

In another development, the Security Council this afternoon held consultations on the Persian Gulf conflict. The Council still has before it a request for a meeting submitted by the Arab Maghreb Union, supported by the Sudan, Jordan, Cuba and Yemen. Among them, two countries -- Cuba and Yemen -- are members of the Council. As this afternoon's consultations began, the

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Ambassador of Cuba stated he would decline to take part in any further consultations -- unless they were specifically in preparation for an open Council meeting.

In other news, the Secretary-General today met with the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Esmat Abdel Meguid, who was conveying to Mr. Perez de Cuellar the views of his Government on the Gulf crisis.

Talking to correspondents after the meeting, the Egyptian Foreign Minister said he had brought no new peace initiative from his Government. He expressed appreciation for the role played by the Secretary-General and the United Nations in trying to reach a peaceful solution. Egypt condemned the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait and supported the implementation of the Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 678 (1990) which set the 15 January deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, he said.

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has begun a programme of emergency food distribution to alleviate shortages and hardships experienced by Palestinian refugees and non-refugees alike.

UNRWA's action is in response to food shortages caused by strictly enforced curfews imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Palestinian population of the occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank, since hostilities began in the Gulf.

The Agency reported that no one was permitted to leave home except during selective liftings of the curfews when women were allowed out to purchase foodstuffs from makeshift or mobile markets. The entire working population of the occupied territory -- estimated at more than 280,000 people -- has been deprived of the opportunity to earn an income during this two-week period. The UNRWA has received reports that both food stocks and cash supplies are running low in most homes.

The Agency has appealed to a number of its traditional major donors for special contributions. A partial distribution in Gaza and the West Bank has already been initiated by the Agency, and further distributions will be carried out as commodities become available.

In a statement issued today, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Giorgio Giacomelli, called on the Israeli authorities to lift curfews in the occupied territory as a humanitarian measure. He said that as an international humanitarian organization, the Agency felt those curfews were an "unnecessary burden on Palestinians who are already suffering greatly from the effects of the Gulf war in terms of lost jobs and income from the Gulf States".

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The Special Committee against Apartheid, at its first meeting of the year, this morning elected its officers and heard statements urging the continuation of sanctions against South Africa and welcoming the meeting two days ago between Nelson Mandela, Deputy President of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC), and Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

The Special Committee re-elected Ibrahim A. Gambari (Nigeria) as its Chairman for 1991. The Chairman said the Committee's central task was to promote the peaceful process of negotiations in South Africa, and that the international community had the duty to maintain pressure on South Africa until a new constitution establishing a non-racial democracy in that country was adopted.

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